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THE
DUCHE['] LETTER
TO
GENERAL WASHINGTON

Rev. JACOB DUCHÉ'S LETTER
TO
GENERAL GEORGE WASHINGTON.

Philadelphia, Oct: 8th, 1777.

Sir,

If this Letter should find you in council or in the field, before you read another Sentence, I beg you to take the first opportunity of retiring—and weighing its important Contents. You are perfectly acquainted with the part I formerly took in the present unhappy Contest.—I was, indeed, among the first to bear my public Testimony against having any recourse to threats, or indulging a thought of an armed Opposition. The Current however was too strong for my feeble efforts to resist. I wished to follow my Countrymen as far only as virtue and the Righteousness of their Cause would permit me. I was however prevailed upon, among the rest of my Clerical Brethren in this City, to gratify the pressing desires of my fellow-citizens—by preaching a Sermon to the 2d City Battalion. I was pressed to publish this Sermon and reluctantly consented. From a personal Attachment of near 20 years standing, and a high respect for your Character in private as well as publick life, I took the liberty of dedicating this Sermon to you.—I had your affectionate thanks for my performance in a Letter—[where] in was expressed, in the most delicate & obliging terms—your regard for me and your wishes for a Continuance of my friendship and approbation of your Conduct.

Farther than this I intended not to proceed. My Sermon speaks for itself and wholly disclaims the Idea of Independency. My Sentiments were well known to my friends:—I communicated them without reserve to many respectable Members of Congress who expressed their warm approbation of them. I persisted to the very last moment to use the prayers for my Sovereign—tho'

threatened with insult from the violence of a party. Upon the declaration of Independency I called my Vestry—and solemnly put the Question to them “Whether they thought it best for the peace and welfare of the Congregation to shut up the Churches—or to continue the Service without using the prayers for the Royal Family? This was the sad alternative. I concluded to abide by their decision as I could not have time to consult my spiritual Superiors in England.—They determined it most expedient—under such critical circumstances—to keep open the Churches, that the Congregation might not be dispersed—which we had great reason to apprehend. A very few days after the fatal declaration of Independency I received a Letter from Mr. Hancock sent by Express to Germantown—where my family [were] for the Summer season—acquainting me I was appointed Chaplain to the Congress, and desired my Attendance next Morning at 9 o’Clock. Surprised and distressed as I was by an event I was not prepared to expect—Obliged to give an immediate Attendance, without the opportunity of consulting my Friends, I easily accepted the Appointment. I could have but one Motive for taking this Step. I thought the Churches in danger, and hoped by this means to have been instrumental in preventing those ills I had so much reason to apprehend. I can, however, with truth declare, that I then looked upon Independency rather as an Expedient and hazardous, or indeed, thrown out in Terrorem—in order to procure some favorable terms—than a Measure that was seriously persisted in at all Events. My sudden change of Conduct will clearly evince this to have been my Idea of the matter. Upon the Return of the Committee of Congress appointed to confer with Lord Howe, I soon discerned their whole Intentions. The different accounts which each member gave of this Conference—the time they took to make up the matter for public view, and the amazing Disagreement between the News-Paper accounts and the Relation I myself had from the Mouth of one of the Committee—convinced me—that there must have been some unfair and ungenerous Procedure. This determination, to treat on no other Strain than that of Independency (which put it out of his Lordship’s power) to mention any Terms at all was a sufficient Proof to me, that Independency was the Idol they had long wish’d to set up, and that rather than sacrifice this, they would deluge their Country with Blood. From this moment I determined upon my resignation, and in the beginning of October 1776 sent it in form to Mr Hancock, after

having officiated only two months and three weeks; and from that time, as far as my safety would permit, I have been opposed to all their Measures.—This circumstantial Account of my Conduct I think due to the Friendship you were so obliging as to express for me, and, I hope, will be sufficient to justify my seeming inconsistencies in the part I have acted. And now, Dear Sir, Suffer me, in the language of Truth and real affection, to address myself to you! All the world must be convinced you are engaged in the Service of your Country—from Motives perfectly disinterested. You risked every thing that was dear to you—abandoned the Sweetness of domestic life which your affluent fortune can give the uninterrupted enjoyment of.—But had you, could you have had the least Idea of matters being carried to such a dangerous extremity—Your most intimate Friends shuddered at the thought of a separation from the Mother Country, and I took it for granted that your Sentiments coincided with theirs; what then can be the consequence of this rash and violent measure, and degeneracy of representation? Confusion of Councils blunders without number! The most respectable characters have withdrawn themselves and are succeeded by a great Majority of illiberal and violent men. Take an impartial view of the present Congress—and what can you expect from them? Your feelings must be greatly hurt by the representation of your natural Province. You have no longer a Randolph, a Bland, or a Braxton—Men whose names will ever be revered—whose demands never ran above the first ground on which they set out, and whose truly glorious and virtuous sentiments I have frequently heard with rapture from their own lips! O, my dear Sir! What a sad Contrast of Characters now present! Others whose friends can ne'er mingle with your own. Your Harrison alone remains, and he disgusted with the unworthy Associates. As to those of my own Province—some of them are so obscure that their very names were never in my ears before, and others have only been distinguished for the weakness of their Understandings, and the violence of their tempers. One alone I except from the general charge,—a man of virtue drawn reluctantly, and restrained, by some false ideas of honor, from retreating, after having gone too far. You cannot be at loss to discover whose name answers to this Character.

From the N. England provinces can you find one, that as a Gentleman you could wish to associate with, unless the soft and mild Address of Mr. Hancock, can atone for his want of every

other qualification necessary for the seat which he fills. Bankrupts, Attorneys, and Men of desperate fortunes, are his Collegues. Maryland no longer sends a Tilghman and a protestant Carrol. Carolina has lost its Lynch, and the elder Middleton has retired. Are the dregs of Congress then still to influence a mind like yours? These are not the men you engaged to serve: these are not the Men America has chosen to represent her. Most of them were chosen by a little low faction, and the few Gentlemen that are among them now—are well known to lie on the balance, and looking up to your hand alone to turn the beam: 'Tis you, Sir, and you only, that support the present Congress;—of this you must be fully sensible. Long before they left Philadelphia, their dignity and Consequence was gone;—what must it be now since their precipitate retreat? I write with freedom, but without invective. —I know these things to be true, and I write to one whose own Observations must have convinced him it is so. After this view of the Congress, turn to the Army: the whole world knows that its only existence depends upon you; that your death or Captivity disperses it in a moment; and that there is not a Man on that side the Question in America capable of succeeding you. As to the Army itself, what have you to expect from them? Have they not frequently abandoned you yourself in the hour of extremity? Can you, have you the least Confidence in a set of undisciplined men and officers, many of them have been taken from the lowest of the people, without principle, without Courage; —take away them who surround your person, how very few are there you can ask to sit at your Table? As to your little navy, of that little, what is left? Of the Delaware fleet part are taken, the rest must soon surrender; of those in the other provinces, some are taken, one or two at sea, and others lying unmanned and unrigged in your harbours; and now where are your Resources? Oh! my dear Sir, how sadly have you been abused by a faction void of truth, and void of tenderness to you and your Country? They have amused you with hopes of a declaration of war on the part of France: Believe me, from the best Authority, it was a fiction from the first. Early in the year 1776 a French Gentleman was introduced to me, with whom I became intimately acquainted. His business to all appearance—was to speculate in the mercantile way; but I believe it will be found, that in his Country he moved in a higher sphere. He saw your Cause; he became acquainted with all your military preparations; he was

introduced to Congress, and engaged with them in a commercial Contract. In the course of our intimacy—he has frequently told me—that he hoped the Americans would never think of Independency; he gave me his reasons: “Independency can never be supported unless France should declare War against England. I well know the state of her Finances—years to come will not put them in a Situation to enter upon a breach with England. At this moment there are two parties in the Court of Versailles; one enlisted under the Duke de Choiseul, the other under Count Maurepas. Choiseul has no chance of succeeding, tho’ he is violent for war; Maurepas must get the better,—he is for economy and peace.” This was his information, which I mentioned to several Members of Congress; they treated it as a Fable—depending entirely on Doctor Franklin’s intelligence. The truth of the matter is this, Doctor Franklin built upon the success of Choiseul; upon his Arrival in France, he found him out of place, his Councils reprobated, and his party dwindled into an insignificant faction: This you may depend upon to be the true state of Affairs in France or the Court of Doctor Franklin. And further by vast numbers of Letters found on board prizes taken by the King’s Ships, it appears, that all commerce with the Merchants, thro’ whom all your supplies have been conveyed, will be at an end; the letters being full of complaints of no remittances from America, and many individuals having generally suffered. From your Friends in England you have nothing to expect, their numbers have diminished to a Cypher; the spirit of the whole nation is in activity, a few sounding names among the Nobility, tho’ perpetually rung in your ears, are without character, without influence. Disappointed ambition has made them desperate, and they only wish to make the deluded Americans instruments of revenge. All orders and ranks of men in Great Britain are now unanimous, and determined to risque their all with Content. Trade and Manufactures are found to flourish, and new Channels are continually offering—that will perhaps more than supply the loss of the old. In America your harbours are blocked up, your cities fall one after another; fortress after fortress, battle after battle is lost. A British Army after having passed unmolested thro’ a vast Extent of Country, have possessed themselves of the Capital of America. How unequal the Contest? How fruitless the expence of blood? Under so many discouraging Circumstances—can virtue, can honor, can the love of your Country—prompt you to proceed?

Humanity itself, and sure humanity is no stranger to your breast, calls upon you to desist. Your army must perish for want of common necessities, or thousands of innocent Families must perish to support them: Wherever they encamp, the country must be impoverished; wherever they march, the troops of Britain will pursue and must complete the destruction which America herself has begun. Perhaps it may be said—it is better to die than to be made Slaves: This indeed is a splendid Maxim in Theory, and perhaps in some instances may be found experimentally true; but when there is the least probability of an accommodation, surely wisdom and humanity call for some sacrifices to be made, to prevent inevitable destruction. You well know there is but one invincible bar to such Accommodations, could this be removed, other obstacles might readily be removed.

It is to you and you alone your bleeding Country looks and calls aloud for this sacrifice, your Arm alone has strength sufficient to remove this bar;—May heaven inspire you with this glorious resolution of exerting your strength at this Crisis, and immortalizing yourself as friend and guardian to your Country; your penetrating eye needs not more explicit language to discern my meaning; with that prudence and delicacy therefore, of which I know you possess'd, to represent to Congress, the indispensable necessity of rescinding the hasty and ill-advised declaration of Independency. Recommend, you have an undoubted right to recommend, an immediate cessation of hostilities. Let the Controversy be taken up where that declaration left it, and where Lord Howe certainly expected to find it left. Let men of clear and impartial Characters, in or out of Congress, liberal in their sentiments heretofore, independent in their fortunes (and some such may be found in America) be appointed to confer with his Majesty's Commissioners. Let them, if they please, prepare some well-digested constitutional plan, to lay before them at the commencement of the Negotiation; when they have gone thus far, I am confident the usual happy consequences will ensue; unanimity will soon take place thro' the different provinces; thousands who are now ardently wishing and praying for such a measure, will step forth and declare themselves the Zealous Advocates for Constitutional Liberty, and Millions will bless the hero that left the field of War, to decide this most important Contest with the weapons of wisdom and humanity. Oh! Sir, let no false idea of worldly honor deter you from engaging in so glorious a task; whatever

censures may be thrown out by mean illiberal minds, your character will rise in the estimation of the virtuous and noble, it will appear with lustre in the Annals of history, and form a glorious contrast to that of those—who have fought to obtain conquest, and gratify their own ambition by the destruction of their species and the ruin of their country. Be assured, Sir, that I write not this under the eye of any British Officer, or any person connected with the British Army or Ministry. The sentiments I express are the real sentiments of my own heart, such as I have long held, and which I should have made known to you by Letter before, had [I] not fully expected an opportunity of a personal conference with you. When you passed thro' Philadelphia on your way to Wilmington, I was confined by a severe fit of the Gravel, to my chamber; I have since continued so much indisposed, & times have been so distressing, that I had neither spirit to write a letter, nor an opportunity to convey it when written, nor do I yet know by what means I shall get these sheets to your hands; I would fain hope that I have said nothing by which your delicacy can be in the least hurt; if I have, I assure you, it has been without the least intention, and therefore your Candor will lead you to forgive me. I have spoke freely of Congress and the Army, but what I have said is partly from my own knowledge, and partly from the information of some respectable members of the former, and some of the best Officers in the latter; I would not offend the meanest person upon earth; what I say to you, I say in confidence to answer what I cannot but deem a most valuable purpose. I love my Country, I love you; but to the love of truth—the love of peace and the love of God, I hope I should be enabled, if called upon to the trial, to sacrifice every other inferior love. If the arguments made use of in this Letter should have so much influence, as to engage you in the glorious work, which I have warmly recommended, I shall ever deem my success the highest temporal favor that Providence could grant me. Your interposition and advice, I am confident, would meet with a favorable reception from the authority under which you act; if it should not, you have an infallible recourse still left—negotiate for your Country at the head of your Army. After all it may appear presumption as an individual to address himself to you on a subject of such magnitude, or to say what measures would best secure the interest & welfare of a whole Continent. The friendly and favorable opinion you have always expressed for me emboldens me to under-

take it; and which has greatly added to the weight of this motive. I have been strongly impressed with a sense of duty upon the Occasion, which left my conscience uneasy and my heart afflicted ---till I fully discharged it. I am no Enthusiast—the cause is new and singular to me, but I could not enjoy one moment's peace till this Letter was written. With the most ardent prayers for your spiritual, as well as temporal welfare—I am,

Sir,

Your most obedient and
humble Friend and Servant
JACOB DUCHÉ.

His Excellency General Washington.

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